

THE GREAT MUTE AND THE PIANO

There is hardly a man who would listen to music without "making" his own film. However different the perceptions are at the contact with a certain musical composition besides the emotional and associational perceptions there exists the image or the "subject - plot" way of thinking. The latter is that reaction of the hearer at which he unvoluntarily creates in his notions different strange picture creations. It is evident that depending on the specific creative line there can be created spontaneously visual images that form a complete story. The unlimited dramatic tension of Beethoven's symphonies and the out-springing vitality of the compositions of Mozart provoke so naturally picturesqueness of the perception that the initial frivolity of the associations gradually transforms music into image equivalents. This leads to the conclusion that the number of the films that would be made in the minds of the listeners depends only on the number of listeners of the musical composition.

At the contact with films from the time of the Great Mute / when musical accompaniment was missing / the spectator could not but feel that the rhythm of a given episode, the movements of the actors and their plasticity, the close-up face expressions as well as the plot denouements create not only a specific mood. They "sound", they "emit" music, which can be perceived differently depending on the sensual ability and the author's predisposition of the spectator. The action on the screen, especially if that is a film of Chaplin, B. Keaton, Griffith, Loyd and others, is ingeniously "measured" through the tempo of each scene, through the melody of every expressed state of the soul. The music coded in those films is not a synchronised with the action type of

sound re-creation of the event and of the experience on the language of music .

If someone makes an effort to play asound-screen for a film he will inevitably come to the conclusion that to compose the music for a given film which " comes in " or " moves away " in some episodes or is the emotional background of the action is onething which is quite different from the case when the composition should sound all the time during the action of the film and not to intrude with its pretenciousness or with a concert way of sounding of the instrument.

It is not occasionally that the term " musical accompaniment " is often used to label the participation of one piano-player at the screen-sounding of some of the silent films. It is much more necessary then to create a separate original composition for every silent film. For any composer or performer it would be a great praise to act as a partner through his composition or performance to the genius of the Great Mute.

If someone takes upon itself the responsibility of making a sound-screen for a silent film with a real performance on the piano before the screen, then, no matter what his preliminary idea was , no matter what he has prepared for every separate scen in any case he will not stand the temptation during the film-show to give freedom to his subconscious desires provoked by the " suggestion of the moment " instead of performing the part prepared before. Probably that is one of the reasons for the high evaluation of the real musical accompaniment - the spontaneous improvisation. The composer or the performer will realise that if a good improvising composing reflexion has been formed by the practise the at the real sound-screening of a film the melodies and the motifs will come as if on their own will and will be

drawn away from the moving on the keyboard fingers. Thus till the moment when the consciousness intrudes with its preliminary intentions and suggestions the subconsciousness has already perceived the message of the screen and has drawn away from the instrument "its own music".

The piano has not occasionally been proclaimed an instrument that contains in itself a whole orchestra. The magic of the performer is to provoke its orchestra way of sounding as well as to interpret certain musical instruments through well-arranged tune combinations. So it's quite natural that the piano will be doomed to accompany the Great Mute from the very birth of the latter. The possibilities of the piano at sound-screening of silent films are quite extraordinary because the quickness of the reaction of the performer and the instant synchronisation with the action of the film provide much more lightened preparation of the interpretation. In comparison with this the orchestra performance requires a rehearsal work of much longer duration because of the much more difficult synchronisation with the episodes of the films and the much more complicated synchronisation among the different performers in the orchestra.

Practice has proved that the original music created for a certain silent film is a preferable condition for its perception in comparison with the "quotations" of the performer from different popular and connected with other associations of the spectator motifs. With the real sound-screening of the piano the strength of the sound is of very great importance in connection with the given conditions of the cinema. A piano would intrude on the film if the performer uses concert means with pretentious technical and stylistic interpretations besides the strength of

the sound. In this way the instrument would really start sounding on its own.

A great creative achievement is for the musical accompaniment to underline the semantic and emotional message of certain episodes of the film, to accentuate on essential details of the representation, to make nuances between the complicated states of soul, to suggest and interpret the plot denouements and to leave the consciousness of the spectator for long conquered by well-remembered melodies. If the sound-screen is made for a comedy the in accordance with the action, the music requires such a tempo/spe and such situational nuances that would help to display the atmosphere of the comic on its best. Much more careful should be the sound-screening of a dramatic film work where there are sentiments and romanticism characteristic for the beginning of the century. The contemporary requires that these would be rendered through more acceptable for him stylistic expressive musical forms.

The most supreme creative examination for every composer and performer is to draw out of the piano the orchestra and solo sounding of the characteristic following one after the other at the highest possible and even crazy speed episodes from films like "Intolerance" of D. W. Griffith. Much more engaging and demanding is the creative task for such a 3-hour film to be acquired and learned the necessary knowledge for the history and music of four epochs that merge into one another in that film in more and more accelerating speed. The piano performer has to alternate the interpretation of scenes from the time of Christ, then to pass through Babylon, then to survive St. Bartholomew's Eve in order to take part in the preservation of a human life in the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed there's hardly a better incentive for the self-education of a musician: in order to be able to

re-creat with the piano " the spirit of the-times " the artist has to learn and perform the music of so many different epoches and human cultures. How big is the creative satisfaction for that artist who had managed to draw out the music that had been contained in the episodes of such films.

It's really extraordinary art : through the piano to make a sound-screen for the innocent tears and the sorrowful smile of Lillian Gish performing the part of the girl in the film " The Broken Lily " ; after parts of the second to represent the senseless rudeness of the brutalised father, who has broken that fragile life ; and at the same time to discover the tunes that would best express the limitless tragedy in the eyes of the Chinese who had lost his love and suffers disconsolately after his loss .

Today the cinema possesses all the means that are in the position to make the Great Mute speak, to introduce himself before us in a colourful image and to sound with all possible sound effects. However the present technique is not capable of replacing the unique natural sound of the piano. It is not able to offer us co-experience and correspondence with the past which are achieved through re-creation of the action of the film with real musical performance. The following of that supreme aesthetic uniqueness means not only preservation of the traditions of the Great Mute from the beginning of the century but it also creates the extreme opportunity for the creation of original musical compositions which would not have appeared without the magnetic influence of the already known and newly discovered in the archives films.

One great film usually attracts or creates its great composer. A big musical composition very often finds its big film making him an unseparable part of its content. And , if the films

of Maestro Fellini would hardly " Breathe " without the music of Nino Rotta , it is also true that the Great Mute would have panted and gasped for a long time before becoming an art if it wasn't for the kind co-partnership in his development of Its Majesty The Alive Piano .

It was our duty to pay it that honour.

Valentin Stamov